

2 Together

Mr. *Gordon's*

THANKSGIVING

DISCOURSES.

MISSOURI

1850

Mr. Gordon's

THANKS

DISCOURSES



MISSOURI

3.

DISCOURSE

P R E A C H E D

In the Morning

O F

December 15th 1774.

BEING THE DAY RECOMMENDED

By the Provincial Congress ;

B Y

WILLIAM GORDON.

PASTOR OF THE THIRD CHURCH IN ROXBURY.

B O S T O N : Printed for, and Sold by THO-
MAS LEVERETT, Corn-Hill. 1775.

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DISCOURSE

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Lam. III. 22.

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

THE book of lamentations is an elegy, composed by the prophet *Jeremiah*, on occasion of the terrible desolation that had been brought upon Judah and Jerusalem, by the conquests of the Chaldean army. The prospect of those calamities, which he foretold, and threatned the Jews with, in the name of the Lord, made him cry out, *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people!* and when they were actually arrived, he laments over them with the deepest and most pungent sorrow. The whole book is filled with those beautiful and strong expressions of grief, that it is difficult which to prefer. The prophet while he laments, describes in most piercing language the various miseries, that had been brought upon his country, and the capital thereof, by the horrors of war. He paints from sight and not from imagination, and so doing, gives a kind of reality to what he describes, owing to which,

which, we rather see them, than read their history. We may be sure that *Jeremiah* felt much for his people and country, from the feeling manner in which he sets forth their distresses ; and that he was far from being, that enemy to their interests they charged him with being, on account of his giving advice that was not pleasing to them. A good man will sympathize with, and pity the community of which he is a part, when it's under the judgments of heaven, tho' he himself, through special circumstances, should be exempted in some measure from them. Religion, when true and unfeigned, dilates the heart, filling it with benevolence and compassion to mankind in general ; but it destroys not a particular affection for certain societies, with whom we are more intimately connected by social ties, no less than the common ones of human nature.

IN the chapter containing our text, *Jeremiah* speaks much, though not always, in the singular number, and in the first person, as though he alluded to himself only ; but we must understand him, rather as personating God's people in their present distress, which is variously represented under different figures. But though it abounds with lamentation, yet it is far from being filled therewith, in every part. Some of the verses breath a different strain, and contain an acknowledgement of the divine goodness. Thus our text, *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not* ; from whence I would raise the following observation,

I. IN the first place, that the forest calamities should not make us overlook our mercies, nor prevent our being thankful for them.

LET

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LET us consider this observation. It supposes, that in the seasons of the greatest distress we have some mercies. And who is there that will *formally* deny it—but what will readily acknowledge it, when under no special calamity? However, let the scene change, and painful grievous trials overtake us, and what a difference do they occasion! Many then lose sight of the good they possess; and are as much strangers to the mercies attending them, as though they had them not. Their minds are so engrossed with their afflictions, that they neither can, nor will recollect the others. By their continual groaning and complaining, you would be led to infer that they did not believe, that they had a single benefit remaining, and had felt a change worse than what *Job* experienced, more grievous than ever any other was acquainted with. But be our calamities ever so great and many, upon inquiring fairly into the matter, and divesting ourselves of the prejudices, arising from the dictates of animal nature when pained, we shall be soon convinced that we are in the enjoyment of some mercies. Have we not certain advantages that tend to alleviate our distresses? If we are poor, have we not a good share of health? If poor and sickly, have we not places wherein to abide, and friends to help us? If we are pained, have we not conveniences to accommodate us, so that we suffer less than otherwise? Are we bereaved of near and dear relatives, or of our best friends; still, have we not acquaintance in whom we can find some relief? Are we cruelly persecuted by inveterate enemies; have we no one to help, or at least to pity us? And pity is a species of comfort to the distressed—it alluages the anguish of the mind,
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and hath the quality of an anodyne. But let us suppose, that we labour under a complication of disorders and distresses, as great as our own prejudices and partiality can imagine, have we not the hope of a full deliverance, when life closeth, through the abounding of God's grace, in and by his Son Jesus? Should a consciousness of the manner in which we have conducted, of the ungodly lives we have lived, of the neglect with which we have treated the Saviour of the world, the prince of life, the Lord of glory, prevent our having this hope; yet, have we not God's own unchangeable word to assure us, that if we repent and believe in his Son, we shall escape deserved punishment hereafter, and be raised to the undeserved joys of heaven? And have we not space given us, wherein to repent and believe? Nothing then, but a mixture of the greatest baseness and perverseness, will prevent our owning, that we have some mercies in the seasons of our worst distress. And while we own them, let us not attempt making them as *few* and as *light* as possible. 'Tis too common for persons, under the anguish of great afflictions, to lessen and disparage their mercies. But the worst calamities should neither make us overlook them, nor prevent our being thankful for them. We ought not, by any means, through displeasure at the divine providence for having laid us under heavy trials, to be blind to those several instances of compassion which the Lord is exercising towards us. We should not willingly pass them over. We should rather make the *most* of them, and the *best* of them; that so our thankfulness may flow out the more freely, and may not be soon exhausted. The benefit that arises from an afflicted person's considering

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considering attentively the good he is favoured with, and habituating himself to thanksgivings on the account of it, is beyond what those, who have not experienced or observed it, can imagine. It is wonderful how such an one will support his sorrows; how pleasantly he will talk of the wisdom and goodness of God's government. When you visit him, you can scarce gather from the turn of his conversation, that he views himself under any special exercise, and you go away, upon leaving him, with a pleasing amazement at his christian patience.

I would now further observe, from it's being said, *it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed,*

II. IN the 2d place, that however fore our calamities may be, they amount not to a total *consumption* of our own persons.

SOMETHING of this kind has been already hinted, but I mean here to dwell a little upon the thought. Our comforts may be consuming around us. They may have been blasted by the righteous and wise appointment of heaven, and may be dying gradually, though certainly, and yet not be actually dead. Our relations, friends, and acquaintance may be dropping off one after another in quick succession, and yet not be totally taken away. But should all these enjoyments be wholly *consumed*, instead of being only *consuming*; still *we ourselves are not consumed*. We have our lives given us as a prey, and are escaped with them, amidst the devastations that have surrounded us. Is not life more than those enjoyments that we have lost? for what is it that persons will not part with, in order to retain and prolong

it? skin for skin, one commodity after another, yea all that a man hath, will he give for his life. The beauty will part with all the pleasing graces of her shape and face, and take up with deformity, rather than fall before some sore distemper, and become the prey of worms and rottenness. The strong rejoices that he hath been spared, though his constitution has been so shattered, as that he is never more the same man as before. Yea, the wise are thankful for their recovery, even when their mental powers have been so impaired, as that they have been thereby reduced to a level with the generality of mankind, and in the change they have experienced, have been a standing confirmation of the eminent propriety of that scripture direction, *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exerciseth loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight saith the Lord.* Jer. 9. 23, 24. Some indeed when exercised with sore calamities, are so disgusted with their present existence, that they call for death to rid them of their troubles, without considering often, that should they not be true penitents and real believers in the Lord Jesus, their troubles would be far from ending with this life, instead thereof, would be greatly increased in a future state. Of those that thus call upon death to appear and relieve them of the burden with which they are oppressed, one and another, was he to present himself personally before them, would, like the man in the fable, devise an excuse to get rid of him, he would prove such a king of terrors to them. There are, it is true, an unhappy few, whose
weakness

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weakness and wickedness, are greatly to be lamented, that abandon themselves to that worldly sorrow which worketh their death, by leading them into the commission of that enormous crime—suicide. But, after all that the suffering and distressed may plead in favour of their wishing for death, merely upon the principle of obtaining relief from present trouble; in general, life is more than all the enjoyments that we may have lost: For in this changing world, we may still be favoured with good days. We may live to possess what may make us joyful. The day may dawn afresh upon us, though now involved in the darkness of night. We may live and get through those painful scenes that afflict and terrify us; and the evening of life may, after all, be calm and placid, like what frequently happens after a stormy disagreeable day. *Job* when upon the rack, and under the torture Satan had prepared for him, cursed the day of his birth, and lamented that he could not die. “Wherefore (said he) is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul? which long for death but it cometh not, and dig for it more than for hid treasures; which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad when they can find the grave.” But you are not ignorant of the end of *Job*; how that after his trial, he was a greater and happier man than ever; for the Lord, besides clearing up the character of *Job*, wiping away the aspersions ignorantly cast out against his integrity and godliness, blessed his latter end more than his beginning, for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses, together with sons and daughters

as before, with this additional circumstance pleasing especially to an aged parent, that in all the land, were no women found fair like the daughters of *Job*. Let us then be thankful for life, as we may possibly live and see better times. *We are not consumed*. This or that person may object, " though we are not *consumed*, yet we are *consuming apace* ; flesh and heart is failing daily ; we shall be soon consumed, unless a miracle should prevent, which it would be a presumptuous weakness to expect ". Allowing the truth of all this, yet let me remind such, that they are not consumed, nor *consuming* in the flames of hell. I use the words consumed and consuming, as being led thereto by our text ; but it is improperly, as the persons of the wicked will not really consume in the flames of the bottomless pit. In that place of torments their comforts shall all be consumed, but themselves never. It would be some relief to them under their punishment ; could they find themselves gradually consuming, though it was ever so slowly, for they would then, instead of despairing, hope that at length they should be wholly consumed ; but the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. With all our sorrows, we are not under the enduring sorrows of hell, we are not feeling the horrors and agonies of the second death.

Proceed we to observe,

III. In the 3d place, that had we received according to our *demerits*, we had been *consumed* ; yea, all our hopes of being profited by death had been consumed.

THE generality have their minds but little exercised about their demerits. They have scarce

any notion of their deserving heavy punishments, and that truly, because they do not give into any special enormities. They are not chargeable in the account of fellow creatures with high crimes and misdemeanors, but are upon the whole regular and orderly; and therefore it does not enter their thoughts, that they are worthy of any particular correction. Hence, should infinite wisdom lay them under sore exercises, they murmur and complain as though they were hardly dealt by, and imagine themselves cruelly treated. They suppose further, that, being thus afflicted, they must not be punished hereafter; and that it would be great injustice in God to cast them into everlasting burnings. To what must we reckon all these mis-conceptions? They are owing, to their not attending to the sins they are chargeable with; to their having no proper sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin; and to their not considering the many great obligations they are under to the most high God.

THE sins such are chargeable with are not attended to. They are too ready to think nothing sins, but murder, drunkenness, whoredom, theft and the like; as though it was no sin, to live in the neglect of religion, without God in the world; to shut him out of the heart; to place the affections upon the creature, rather than upon the Creator; to be an enemy to holiness, while there was no direct opposition to the forms of godliness; to seek happiness wholly in this world, and to disregard heaven; to condemn that costly sacrifice which infinite love has provided as an atonement for sin, by slighting it; and to refuse unreserved obedience to him, whom God has constituted

constituted king in *Sion*. These offences however venial they may appear to the sinner, are highly displeasing to God, and justly expose the criminal to the miseries of the bottomless pit. He may indeed quarrel with that sentence which the law denounces against him : but he would judge differently was he acquainted with the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

THE malignity of sin is great beyond the conception of the creature. No being but the almighty can fully comprehend it, for none but himself can be properly sensible of the indignity offered him, through the commission of it. Had it not been an inconceivable evil, it would never have wrought such a dreadful change in those of the angels, that kept not their first estate ; it had never provoked the Lord to have provided such a horrid place for the punishment of it ; it had never perpetuated that punishment to an endless duration ; it had never produced such melancholy disorder among the works of heaven ; it had never exposed the whole race of mankind to future miseries ; it had never required the death of so strange and honourable a sacrifice as the Son of God, to have atoned for it. Sin implies that contempt of, and virulent opposition to, the greatest and best of all beings, that entitles it to the epithet of *exceeding sinful*.

BUT it is not the greatness and goodness of God alone, that evinces our demerit in sinning against him ; the obligations we are under to him do also confirm it. Besides that special obligation we are under to him for our existence, as the creatures of his power, there are those which
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arise from his upholding and protecting us, and from the many benefits which he has been continually bestowing upon us. As the creatures of God, ever dependent upon him, and constant partakers of his bounty, we should have been all obedience and compliance, to and with whatever He was pleased to command and order; more especially as He could not, through the unlimited perfection of his nature, require any thing but what was in the highest degree righteous and good, nor do other than justly. But who is there that hath been all obedience and compliance? Where shall we find in our world the man that hath done good perseveringly, and hath not sinned? Such a good man is not to be met with on earth. In many things we have all offended; and do we pretend to say that we have not sinned, we give the God of truth the lie, than which there cannot be a grosser insult, or blacker blasphemy. We have sinned so often, and so much, that it is meet we should cry out, *who can understand his errors? God be merciful to us sinners!* Such have been and are our demerits, through the sinfulness of our natures, and the many, the innumerable sins of omission and commission with which we are chargeable, that had we received according to them, we had been consumed: we had been even there where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched—where there is nothing but wailing and gnashing of teeth, not so much as the least gleam of hope to moderate the distress and anguish of the tormented.

HENCE I proceed to observe,

IV. In the 4th and last place, that it is owing not only to the mercies of God, but the continuance of his compassions that we are not consumed.

SHOULD we be justified in making a distinction between the divine mercies and compassions, I should be ready to say, that the first respected the miseries of those upon whom they were exercised, the last their sinfulness and demerit ; but possibly the different terms might be meant to express one and the same thing. The mercies or compassions of God are enduring. The continuance of the divine mercy is much celebrated in the book of *Psalms*. It is the burden of one whole psalm, every verse of which ends with—*for his mercy endureth for ever* : the 136th. 'Tis a noble topick, and richly deserved to be so celebrated. 'Tis what we should be much in admiring, should frequently think and speak of, with glowing gratitude, for it lies at the foundation of all the good, we either have or hope to possess. We are not favoured upon the principle of our deserving it, from any comparative advantage that we may enjoy over others ; for, however we may not have transgressed as they, yet we have so transgressed as to have forfeited all our comforts into the hands of divine justice, and to be wholly at the mercy of God. There is a strange proneness in persons to compare themselves with others, whom they apprehend to be more faulty ; and to imagine, from the preeminence they appear to possess, that they have a degree of merit which entitles them in measure to the mercies they receive. How strongly does this cast oppose the current of scripture, which is often inculcating contrary sentiments ! Instead of indulging such a cast, that has a secret tendency to promote much spiritual pride, let us remember and apply to ourselves those words in the 36th of *Ezekiel* and 32d verse, *Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God,*

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God, be it known unto you : be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. 'Tis not owing to merit, personal merit, though to the blessed merit of an adorable surety, that the holiest man on earth is not consumed. And let it be remarked, that the more holy a man is, the more heartily and feelingly will he join, in saying, it is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not ; for such an one will be most sensible, of the evil of sin, of his own sinful infirmities, of the spirituality of the divine law, and of the glories of the great Jehovah.

Let me now close the present service with the following improvement.

1. And in the first place what call for thankfulness have those, that since the last day of this kind, have not been exercised with any particular afflictions, nor had their peace and happiness interrupted by any special providences, excepting those of a public nature, in which all are concerned.

You have gone through another year, without having been brought to the gates of the grave by sickness. God has been the health of your countenance, no less than the length of your days. You have not been called, through anguish, to water your couch with tears ; and to tumble from side to side of your bed through excruciating pains, seeking rest without finding. You have not been made to possess months of vanity, wearisome nights have not been appropriated to you. When you have laid down, your

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sleep has not fled from you ; you have not said when shall I arise and the night be gone ; you have not been full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. You have enjoyed day and night, alternately, answerable to the gracious intentions of him, who formed the light and created darkness. You have had little or no sickness in your family ; but the individuals of it have been healthy and well, capable of filling up their several places according to your wishes. You have been so far prospered and succeeded, as that you have not laboured in vain, nor spent your strength for nought. You have been blessed with the smiles of a common providence, so that you have had food to eat and raiment to put on. Surely this should be a day of thanksgiving to you : And you will be greatly to blame, if you are not affected with that divine goodness which has passed before you, and distinguished you wonderfully from others, it may be, your next neighbour. The adjoining family may have gone through a scene of affliction ; it may have been visited with the sorrows of death. Will you say, that you have deserved to be so distinguished from it ? Upon a review of your behaviour and temper must you not own, that they have been so faulty, so much the reverse of your christian character, so unworthy of that holy vocation wherewith you have been called, as that it is of the *Lord's mercies* that you are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. Make this then a day of thanksgiving, not by an irregular indulgence of your carnal appetites, but by keeping your hearts lifted up to God in grateful acknowledgments of his free and unmerited favour
toward

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towards you; and by winding up the springs of holy obedience, that you may move on with vigour in the way of duty, may not stand still, but run the race set before you. A thanksgiving day is not designed as a settling the account between us and God for the mercies of the preceding year, which being done we are discharged from taking any further notice of them; but for the recollection and acknowledgment of the same, accompanied with a solemn engagement to live answerable to them for the future.

2. In the second place, have we not been exempted, since the last day of this kind, from various trying providences, still let us consider what have been our mercies, how much beyond what we have deserved, and let us be heartily thankful for them.

HAVE we been under pains and sickness, more than we were ever before acquainted with; or have our families been sorely afflicted; or have we had our substance lessened, and our property diminished; or have we been deprived of some of our nearest and dearest friends and relatives, whose loss we shall feel for the remainder of our days, still we have had our exercises moderated by the continuance, or bestowment of valuable comforts. There has been something to alleviate our condition, and to prevent it's being of all others the most miserable. Though our substance may have been lessened, it has not been wholly annihilated, we have food to eat and raiment to put on. Our families may have undergone disagreeable changes; but they have not been broken

broken up and scattered far and wide. We may have been disordered, frequently and much ; but it has not been so long nor heavy, as might have been ; and at least, we have reached to this day, and have been enabled to attend this service. And have we been deprived by the stroke of death, of our dearest relatives ; yet we have some remaining, if not relatives, friends, in whom we can find comfort, and with whom we can pass away many of our future hours with pleasure. But could it be, that we had neither relative nor friend among fellow-mortals, 'twould be our sin had we not a friend and father in the ever-living God. And yet was even this the case, we have a call for thankfulness, for the gospel proposes to us, for our acceptance, a Saviour able to deliver out of present trouble, and to grant everlasting happiness. How much is this beyond our demerits ! and what thanksgivings ought to flow from our hearts, for our not having been *consumed*, before we had heard of it. May we not be so foolish as to neglect the Saviour, till we are *consumed* by the King of terrors ; for if so, we shall come under the power of the second death, and in vain wish that we could be *utterly consumed*. But while I mention the Saviour, to engage in thanksgivings those who may be destitute of all earthly good, life only excepted, I cannot suppose that there is a single person among us so extremely destitute. Was there ; or in the neighbourhood ; or within the reach of assistance, I should think it my duty upon being acquainted with it, to afford him assistance and to sweeten the cup of his bitterness with some drops of comfort, in honour to humanity,

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humanity, was not christianity concerned, however unworthy he may have been—and especially on such a day as the present.

3. In the third and last place, let us remember that though we are not consumed, yet we are *daily* consuming, and should therefore be found living daily a life of faith and obedience, that so it may be a mercy to us whenever we come to be consumed by the stroke of death.

To the young it may appear strange to assert that they are consuming daily, when they are constantly growing up to maturity, and are increasing in their strength and vigour. But however they may not attend to it, every moment they live, lessens the time of their life, and brings them nearer to death. They have a day less to live, than they had yesterday: and they will be another day nearer the grave on the morrow. We may compare their life to a single turn of a wheel; and their youth to the rising part of it, which the faster it advances, comes the sooner to the summit, and the sooner completes the circuit. Those in middle life may seem to be at a stand, like the sun when at it's solstice; but though they feel themselves full of life and activity, their time is wasting, and their strength tending to a decline; and in a few more years, if spared, they will perceive, at least that they are growing old. The aged know that they are consuming, from the feelings of sense. They have pains and aches that they were strangers to in former years; and a multitude of new complaints.

complaints. The sun, the moon, and the stars are dimm'd. The keepers of the house tremble. The strong men bow themselves. The grinders cease because they are few ; and those that look out of the windows are darkened. The daughters of musick are brought low. The almond tree flourisheth. The grass-hopper is a burden and desire faileth. So that they feel themselves gradually approaching the house appointed for all the living. It concerns us all to know that we are daily consuming, whatever our ages are ; and let it be noted, however paradoxical it may sound, equally fast ; for the moments of the young, are no longer in running off, than those of the aged, though there may possibly be more of them ; I say, possibly, as in many instances it is otherwise. And are we consuming daily, let us live the life we now live in the flesh in the faith of the Son of God, under the influence of christian truths, that when the moment comes for our being consumed by death, we may change the present for an eternal life, and follow those that within the circle of the past year have through faith and patience removed from the church militant, to inherit the promises with the church triumphant, when we shall enter upon an *everlasting* day of thanksgiving.

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Mr. Gordon's

THANKSGIVING

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